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Preparation pays off for college bound students

Idaho students who take challenging high school courses continue to score higher on a national college entrance exam, according to ACT results released today. Overall, the Idaho Class of 2005's scores were above their U.S. counterparts on the ACT.

Students in Idaho and across the United States who perform best on the ACT are those who report completing at least four years of English, three years of math, three years of social sciences and three or more years of natural sciences. Idaho is proposing increasing its core requirements for high school students to include more math and science courses.

In Idaho, students with that academic background in all groups had higher average scores than those of their counterparts in the state with less preparation.

2005 Idaho Average ACT Composite Scores by College-Preparatory Minimum Core Coursework and Race/Ethnicity

	Number Tested	Percent Taking Core or More	Average ACT Composite Score	
			Minimum Core	Non-Core
All Students	9,468	46	22.7	20.0
African Am./Black
Am. Indian/Alaskan Native	112	38	20.5	18.4
Caucasian Am./White	7,708	47	22.8	20.3
Hispanic	520	36	20.0	17.1
Asian Am./Pacific Islander	170	51	23.2	20.6

Note: A "." means an insufficient number of students in that category took the ACT.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Marilyn Howard said the results support the state's efforts to improve opportunities for high school students.

"Our goal is to prepare our students to be successful when they leave high school whether they pursue more education or enter the workforce," Howard said. "This data shows that students who take a more challenging course of study are better equipped."

Howard expressed concern over a continued decline in the percentage of students taking the ACT, which has dropped during the past three years from 60.4 percent to 57.9 percent for the Class of 2005. Although Idaho has one of the nation's highest high school graduation rates, it also has one of the lowest rates of students going on to college.

Students are not required to take the ACT. Generally high school students who plan to attend college take the test at their own expense. A state proposal would require students to take a college entrance exam such as the ACT by the end of 11th grade.

"We want our students to plan for a bright future beyond high school," Howard said. "By taking entrance exams, students may discover they are ready for college and will pursue that option."

Number and Percentage of Idaho ACT-Tested High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity, 5-Year Trends

	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
All Students	10,014	100	9,733	100	9,992	100	9,430	100	9,468	100
African Am./Black	32	0	.	.	31	0	31	0	.	.
Am. Indian/Alaskan Native	66	1	87	1	93	1	92	1	112	1
Caucasian Am./White	8,506	85	8,213	84	8,346	84	7,744	82	7,708	81
Hispanic	399	4	439	5	496	5	455	5	520	5
Asian Am./Pacific Islander	177	2	163	2	173	2	183	2	170	2
Other/No Response	834	8	806	8	853	9	925	10	929	10

Note: A "." means an insufficient number of students in that category took the ACT.

Performance of groups

The ACT results for the Class of 2005 also continue to show a performance gap among Hispanics and Native American students when compared to the performance of all students.

Overall performance

In Idaho, higher education institutions require applicants to submit scores from either the ACT or the SAT. The majority of the Class of 2005 – about 57 percent – took the ACT.

Idaho students averaged a 21.3 composite or total score that compares to the national average of 20.9. Both scores are the same as the previous year. Idaho students also outpaced the nation in the subject areas tested: English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning.

During the past five years, Idaho scores have consistently been higher than the nation overall and for each subject area. The chart below shows how Idaho students scored on the ACT subtests and the test as whole during the past five years:

Idaho and National Average ACT Composite and Subject Area Scores, 5-Year Trends

		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
English	State	20.7	20.4	20.3	20.4	20.5
	National	20.5	20.2	20.3	20.4	20.4
Math	State	21.0	20.9	20.8	20.9	20.9
	National	20.7	20.6	20.6	20.7	20.7
Reading	State	22.0	21.9	21.9	22.0	21.9
	National	21.3	21.1	21.2	21.3	21.3
Science	State	21.5	21.3	21.1	21.2	21.2
	National	21.0	20.8	20.8	20.9	20.9
Composite	State	21.5	21.2	21.2	21.3	21.3
	National	21.0	20.8	20.8	20.9	20.9

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